

68// OF THE INVENTION OF THE HOLY CROSS

The “invention” of the holy cross is said because that this day the holy cross was found [Latin, *inventa*]. For tofore it was found of Seth in Paradise terrestrial, like as it shall be said hereafter, and also it was found of Solomon in the Mount of Lebanon, and of the Queen of Sheba in the temple of Solomon, and of the Jews in the water of Piscine, and on this day it was found of Helena in the Mount of Calvary.

THE HISTORY OF THE CROSS BEFORE THE TIME OF CHRIST

Seth

The holy cross was found two hundred years after the resurrection of our Lord. It is read in the gospel of Nicodemus that, when Adam waxed sick, Seth his son went to the gate of Paradise terrestrial for to get the oil of mercy for to anoint withal his father's body. Then appeared to him St. Michael the angel, and said to him, “Travail not thou in vain for this oil, for thou mayst not have it till five thousand and five hundred years be past,” how be it that from Adam unto the passion of our Lord were but five thousand one hundred and thirtythree years.

In another place it is read that the angel brought him a branch, and commanded him to plant it the Mount of Lebanon.

Yet find we in another place that he gave to him of the tree that Adam ate of, and said to him that when that bare fruit he should be guerished and all whole. When Seth came again he found his father dead and planted this tree upon his grave, and it endured there unto the time of Solomon.

Solomon

And because he saw that it was fair, he did do hew it down and set it in his house named Saltus. And when the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, she worshipped this tree, because she said the Saviour of all the world should be hanged thereon, by whom the realm of the Jews shall be defaced and cease. Solomon for this cause made it to be taken up and dolven deep in the ground.

The Great Piscine

Now it happed after, that they of Jerusalem did do make a great pit for a piscine [pool], whereas the ministers of the temple should wash their beasts that they should sacrifice, and there found this tree, and this piscine had such virtue that the angels descended and moved the water, and the first sick man that descended into the water, after the moving, was made whole of whatsoever sickness he was sick of. And when the time approached of the passion of our Lord, this tree arose

out of the water, and floated above the water, and of this piece of timber made the Jews the cross of our Lord.

Then, after this history, the cross by which we be saved came of the tree by which we were damned, and the water of that piscine had not his virtue only of the angel but of the tree.

With this tree, whereof the cross was made, there was a tree that went overthwart, on which the arms of our Lord were nailed, and another piece above, which was the table wherein the title was written, and another piece wherein the socket or mortice was made, wherein the body of the cross stood in, so that there were four manner of trees, that is of palm, of cypress, of cedar, and of olive. So each of these four pieces was of one of these trees.

THE CONVERSION OF THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

This blessed cross was put in the earth, and hid by the space of a hundred years and more, but the mother of the emperor, which was named Helena, found it in this manner. For Constantine came with a great multitude of barbarians nigh unto the river of the Danube, which would have gone over for to have destroyed all the country. And when Constantine had assembled his host he went and set them against that other party, but as soon as he began to pass the river he was much afraid because he should on the morn have battle. And in the night, as he slept in his bed, an angel awoke him, and showed to him the sign of the cross in heaven, and said to him: Behold on high in heaven.

Then saw he the cross made of right clear light, and was written thereupon with letters of gold: In this sign thou shalt overcome the battle.

Then was he all comforted of this vision and on the morn he put in his banner the cross and made it to be borne tofore him and his host, and after, smote in the host of his enemies and slew and chased great plenty.

After this he did do call the bishops of the idols, and demanded them to what God the sign of the cross appertained. And when they could not answer, some Christian men that were there told to him the mystery of the cross, and informed him in the faith of the Trinity. Then anon he believed perfectly in God and did do baptize him.

ST. HELENA FINDS THE HOLY CROSS

And after it happed that Constantine his son remembered the victory of his father, and sent to Helena his mother for to find the holy cross. Then Helena went in to Jerusalem and did do assemble all the wise men of the country, and when they were assembled they would fain know wherefore they were called. Then one Judas said to them: I wot well that she will know of us where the cross of Jesu Christ was laid, but beware you all that none of you tell her, for I wot well, then shall our law be destroyed. For Zacheus, mine old father, said to Simon my father, and my father said to me at his death: “Be well ware that for no torment that ye may suffer, tell not where the cross of Jesu Christ was laid, for after that it shall be found the Jews shall reign no more, but the Christian men that worshipped the cross shall then reign; and verily this Jesus was

the son of God.” Then demanded I my father wherefore had they hanged him on the cross sith it was known that he was the son of God. Then he said to me: “Fair son, I never accorded thereto, but gainsaid it always, but the Pharisees did it because he reproved their vices; but he arose on the third day and, his disciples seeing, he ascended into heaven; then because that Stephen, thy brother, believed in him the Jews stoned him to death.”

Then, when Judas had said these words to his fellows, they answered: We never heard of such things, nevertheless keep thee well, if the queen demand thee thereof, that thou say no thing to her. When the queen had called them and demanded them the place where our Lord Jesu Christ had been crucified, they would never tell ne enseign her. Then commanded she to burn them all, but then they doubted and were afraid, and delivered Judas to her and said: Lady, this man is the son of a prophet and of a just man, and knoweth right well the law, and can tell to you all things that ye shall demand him.

Then the queen let all the others go and retained Judas without more [i.e., immediately]. Then she showed to him his life and death, and bade him choose which he would. Show to me, said she, the place named Golgotha where our Lord was crucified, because and to the end that we may find the cross.

Then said Judas: It is two hundred years passed and more, and I was not then yet born.

Then said to him the lady: By him that was crucified, I shall make thee perish for hunger if thou tell not to me the truth.

Then made she him to be cast into a dry pit and there tormented him by hunger and evil rest. When he had been seven days in that pit, then said he: If I might be drawn out, I should say the truth. Then he was drawn out, and when he came to the place, anon the earth moved, and a fume of great sweetness was felt, in such wise that Judas smote his hands together for joy, and said: In truth, Jesu Christ, thou art the Saviour of the world.

It was so that Adrian the emperor had do make, in the same place where the cross lay, a temple of a goddess, because that all they that came in that place should adore that goddess, but the queen did do destroy the temple. Then Judas made him ready and began to dig, and when he came to twenty paces deep he found three crosses and brought them to the queen, and because he knew not which was the cross of our Lord, he laid them in the middle of the city and abode the demonstrance of God; and about the hour of noon there was the corps of a young man brought to be buried. Judas retained the bier, and laid upon it one of the crosses, and after the second, and when he laid on it the third, anon the body that was dead came again to life.

Then cried the devil in the air: Judas, what hast thou done? Thou hast done the contrary that the other Judas did, for by him I have won many souls, and by thee I shall lose many, by him I reigned on the people, and by thee I have lost my realm, nevertheless I shall yield to thee this bounty, for I shall send one that shall punish thee. And that was accomplished by Julian the Apostate, which tormented him afterward, when he was bishop of Jerusalem. And when Judas

heard him, he cursed the devil and said to him: Jesu Christ damn thee in fire perdurable. After this Judas was baptized and was named Quiriacus, and after was made bishop of Jerusalem.¹

When Helena had the cross of Jesu Christ, and saw that she had not the nails, then she sent to the bishop Quiriacus that he should go to the place and seek the nails. Then he did dig in the earth so long that he found them shining as gold; then bare he them to the queen, and anon as she saw them she worshipped them with great reverence. Then gave St. Helena a part of the cross to her son and that other part she left in Jerusalem, closed in gold, silver, and precious stones. And her son bare the nails to the emperor, and the emperor did do set them in his bridle and in his helm when he went to battle. This rehearseth Eusebius, which, was bishop of Cæsarea, how be it that others say otherwise.

ST. QUIRIACUS IS TORTURED AND KILLED BY JULIAN THE APOSTATE

Now it happed that Julian the Apostate did do slay Quiriacus, that was bishop of Jerusalem, because he had found the cross, for he hated it so much that wheresomever he found the cross he did it to be destroyed. For when he went in battle against them of Persia, he sent and commanded Quiriacus to make sacrifice to the idols, and when he would not do it, he did do smite off his right hand, and said: With this hand hast thou written many letters by which thou repelled much folk from doing sacrifice to our gods.

Quiriacus said: Thou wood [mad] hound, thou hast done to me great profit, for thou hast cut off the hand with which I have many times written to the synagogues that they should not believe in Jesu Christ, and now sith I am Christian thou hast taken from me that which noyed me.

Then did Julian do melt lead and cast it in his mouth, and after did do bring a bed of iron and made Quiriacus to be laid and stretched thereon, and after laid under burning coals and threw therein grease and salt for to torment him the more; and when Quiriacus moved not, Julian the emperor said to him: Either thou shalt sacrifice to our gods, or thou shalt say at the least thou art not Christian.

And when he saw he would do never neither, he did do make a deep pit full of serpents and venomous beasts, and cast him therein. And when he entered, anon the serpents were all dead.

Then Julian put him in a caldron of boiling oil, and when he should enter into it he blessed it, and said: Fair Lord, turn this bath to baptism of martyrdom.

Then was Julian much angry, and commanded that he should be riven through his heart with a sword, and in this manner finished his life.

¹ This is not the same person as the martyred child St. Quiriacus, whose feast was celebrated June 16.

MIRACLES OF THE HOLY CROSS

The virtue of the cross is declared to us by many miracles; for it happed on a time that one enchanter had deceived a notary and brought him into a place where he had assembled a great company of devils, and promised to him that he would make him to have much riches; and when he came there he saw one person black, sitting on a great chair, and all about him all full of horrible people and black which had spears and swords. Then demanded this great devil of the enchanter who was that clerk. The enchanter said to him: Sir, he is ours.

Then said the devil to him: If thou wilt worship me and be my servant and reny Jesu Christ, thou shalt sit on my right side.

The clerk anon blessed him with the sign of the cross, and said that he was the servant of Jesu Christ his Saviour, and anon, as he had made the cross, that great multitude of devils vanished away.

It happed that this notary, after this, on a time entered with his lord into the church of St. Sophia and kneeled down on his knees tofore the image of the crucifix, the which crucifix, as it seemed, looked much openly and sharply on him. Then his lord made him to go apart on another side, and always the crucifix turned his eyes towards him; then he made him go on the left side, and yet the crucifix looked on him, then was the lord much amarvelled, and charged him and commanded him that he should tell him whereof he had so deserved that the crucifix so beheld and looked on him.

Then said the notary that he could not remember him of no good thing that he had done, save that one time he would not reny ne forsake the crucifix tofore the devil.

Then let us so bless us with the sign of the blessed cross that we may thereby be kept from the power of our ghostly and deadly enemy the devil, and by the merits of the glorious passion that our Saviour Jesu Christ suffered on the cross, after this life we may come to his everlasting bliss. Amen.

The iconography of [St. Helena](#) and of [Constantine](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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